

Ohio State Completes Sweep Of Penn State, 61-56



A sleepy Noon tip for Ohio State's Jan. 16 matchup with Penn State extended beyond media row, home to several cups of coffee - which had been expertly smuggled in under Ohio State's new, no-concessions rule. Down on the floor, the Buckeyes didn't seem to get the memo that there was a game to be played until they convened with Holtmann for a spirited conversation at the under-16 timeout.

Prior to that break, the Buckeyes generated just four points on eight shots and fell into a quick deficit, with Penn State jumping out to a 10-4 lead. Chris Holtmann plucked Justin Ahrens and Zed Key from the game and replaced them with Eugene Brown III and Kyle Young, hoping to infuse some energy to his somnolent bunch.

It worked, as Ohio State rode its newfound spark to a dominant stretch of more than 10 minutes, outscoring their neighbors from the East 19-4 out of the timeout until a Jalen Pickett jumper finally cracked a cold spell that had lasted nearly three minutes, cutting into an Ohio State lead that had grown as large as nine points at 23-14.

Although the Nittany Lions would rally back from that paltry stretch, they would never reclaim the lead as Ohio State completed its two-game sweep of the season series with a 61-56 victory that moved it to 11-5 on the season and 5-2 in the Big Ten, while dropping Penn State to 8-7 overall and 3-4 in conference play.

The run proved critical for the Buckeyes even just in the final minutes of the first frame. Despite going the final 5:52 of the first half without a field goal, they still entered the locker room with a 27-22 lead.

Perhaps the biggest moment of the first half came with just under two minutes to play, when Key - who had suffered a lower leg injury earlier in the first half and took a trip to the locker room - returned to the floor to a barrage of cheers from the fans in attendance. For an Ohio State team already down three contributors in Meechie Johnson Jr., Justice Sueing and Seth Towns, another injury to a key player (or

specifically, the Key player) could have proven disastrous, but the sophomore from New York appeared to have only suffered a stinger.

After a first half that saw the Buckeyes and Nittany Lions combine for just 17-of-54 shooting, the second half offered a whole lot more of the same, at least for the latter. Penn State failed to score on its first four possessions out of the break while the Buckeyes, led by four points from Key, jumped out to a game-high 10-point lead, 32-22.

Ohio State's quick start would not last. After scoring five points in the first 2:44 of the half, it found only six more in the next 8:09. Brown and E.J. Liddell combined to snap the cold spell after a Jevonnie Scott dunk that brought the Nittany Lions within striking distance at 38-33, knocking in buckets on three straight possessions to push the lead back to double-digits, though that again would not last.

Dallion Johnson and Pickett knocked down back-to-back triples, split by a Liddell free throw, to bring the game back within five, where it would live for several minutes. It wasn't until Young laid out to nab a defensive rebound with 1:23 to play, up 54-49, that Ohio State would finally lock up the game. He knocked down a pair of free throws, Jamari Wheeler added two more, a Penn State triple went begging and the Buckeyes iced the game at the line.

Liddell led all scorers with 19 points, adding eight rebounds - most among all Buckeyes and tied with John Harrar for the game-high. Key added 10 points of his own, while Sam Sessoms led Penn State with 15. No Buckeyes finished the game with more than three assists.